

What is so remarkable about John is that there is no Alaskan public policy issue he did not master, a pretty incredible feat there but no Alaska public policy issue that he did not have his fingerprints on, involved with or have a mastery of.

In 1972, for example, he served for 2 years on the Executive Advisory Committee of the Federal Power Commission, making decisions on electricity generation during a period of rapid population growth in Alaska. In 1974, he published a legal analysis of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and how it should impact Native Alaskans for the Joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission. Five years later, he served on the Hard Rock Minerals Commission of Alaska, helping to chart a course for the rebirth of our State's mineral industry. There is seemingly no Alaskan issue too complex or daunting for John Katz.

When I first met John, it was probably somewhere in the early 1980s. At the time, I was a staffer in the office of the speaker of the Alaska House of Representatives in Juneau, and I was immediately taken by the kindness of this gentleman, extraordinarily polite to a very young staffer, but also his intellectual prowess that was shown whether it was a casual conversation or whether it was a detailed policy analysis.

Former Gov. Tony Knowles called him "one of the most remarkable public servants I've ever dealt with." Governor Hammond, during the lengthy debate over ANILCA, called him truly indispensable. Senator Stevens once said: "He's as near a genius as I've seen." I would clearly agree with that. Some of his coworkers have even jokingly called him their own human Google machine, noting that in many cases it was more efficient, it was easier to walk down the hall and ask John for legal and policy background, saving them hours of research, and John had it all there, instant recall and as precise as it could possibly be.

Throughout his career, John served effectively and quietly, always preferring to work in the background, never seeking that limelight. He always presented every side of the issue, never telling any of his superiors simply what they might have wanted to hear. He truly was the consummate professional, a man who never got a fact wrong in a briefing, in a discussion or in a political strategy session. That may have been at least one of the many reasons why he has been so honored during his career, receiving the highest honor of the Alaska Federation of Natives, which is the Denali Award, winning Commonwealth North's 2008 Walter J. Hickel Award for distinguished public policy leadership and receiving more resolutions, commendations, and praise than most in Alaska's history.

John has built a reputation as an Alaskan institution, always loyally serving our beloved State. He has

championed oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, noting the potential benefits for not only Alaska's economy but, more important, for America's overall economic and national security. While John has listed the failure, so far, to persuade Congress to open ANWR as perhaps one of his biggest disappointments, he has always stood by the factually solid arguments for opening ANWR, never letting his passionate advocacy of opening the coastal refuge get in the way of objectively presenting arguments to Members of Congress.

I think it is important to note John's statement in his resignation letter to Governor Parnell. He stated the following:

Professionally, I have become increasingly discouraged by the polarization and deterioration of the public policy process at the Federal level. It's the worst I've seen during my 43-year career.

That was the statement in John's resignation note. As someone who has relied on John's wise counsel and his wisdom during my 8 years in the Senate, I think this is a poignant remark about the state of affairs in Congress. The debate surrounding our politics has grown more caustic, while ignoring the fact that while we all may take different positions, we all ultimately have our Nation's interests at heart.

John leaves an esteemed legacy that will benefit Alaska for decades to come. We can learn so much from his example of what a public servant should be, and Alaska will deeply miss his presence. I know I speak for all Alaskans in sincerely thanking John for his years of dedicated service and his pragmatic approach to faithfully serving the State of Alaska. I wish him nothing but the best in the future for all his endeavors.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENDING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I rise about the most important job that faces the Senate in the remainder of the year; that is, extending the unemployment benefits for millions of unemployed Americans struggling to find a job.

I wish I didn't have to be down here talking about this today. I wish it weren't necessary to debate whether we should continue the Federal unemployment insurance program. I wish everyone in this Chamber would acknowledge that the recovery is still a work in progress and that we would agree about the critical need to continue to support struggling workers and their families. We have never

failed to extend benefits in the past when unemployment was this high. But, unfortunately, in today's hyper-partisan atmosphere, even the most commonsense policies can turn into political footballs, and the unemployment insurance program seems to be no exception.

The extreme right is on the attack, blaming the victims who have been the hardest hit by this economic crisis. In the same breath that they push for more cuts in corporate taxes and cuts in taxes to high-income individuals, Republican leaders argue we can't afford to extend unemployment benefits for people who are struggling to find a job. Congresswoman BACHMANN, a candidate for President, recently went so far to say: "If anyone will not work, neither should he eat."

In an economy where there are four unemployed workers for every available job, the cruelty of that comment is simply astonishing. There are 13 million unemployed Americans right now. Actually, I think the figure is probably a little bit higher than that. They are desperately looking for any job they can find, many relying on unemployment benefits to put food on the table for their children.

Six million Americans will be cut off this last lifeline if Congress does not renew the benefits for the long-term unemployed—6 million who will be cut off right after the holiday season. I hope no one in this body on either side of the aisle will say they deserve this additional hardship during this holiday season.

There are real people and real families behind these numbers. They are our friends and neighbors. I have heard from so many of these hard-working people from my home State of Iowa and across the country. Their stories are truly heartbreaking.

A woman from Des Moines recently wrote me:

I was laid off in July 2011. I recently attended a class at the unemployment office in Des Moines, where I was informed that my unemployment will cease as of December the 31st if any extensions that are currently in place are discontinued. The average person is currently unemployed for 40 weeks, which is much longer than the 26 weeks that is available [without] any extensions. I was the main breadwinner in our family and if my unemployment would cease before I find a job, we would be forced to be on welfare, food stamps, and other government subsidies. We would also lose our home. I hope that you consider the many other people that are probably in the same situation as I am and hope that you will keep the current extensions in place.

A woman from Stanton, IA, writes:

I lost a great job in June of 2010 and have been receiving unemployment benefits since then. . . . If not for the unemployment [benefits], I don't know how we would make it. I continue to look for a better paying job but as you probably know, Montgomery County, Iowa has had the highest unemployment rate in Iowa. It's been tough. . . . Will appreciate your support in extending unemployment benefits as I continue my quest for a new position.

The main reason folks need their benefits to continue is they simply

cannot find new work, even after exhausting their benefits. There are simply not enough jobs in this struggling economy. How can we even think about abruptly terminating these benefits right now, cutting off the last lifeline to Americans in dire need?

A man from Estherville, IA, wrote:

I woke up last week to find my benefits exhausted but no closer to finding a job. I do everything possible to find work but nothing materializes. Age-discrimination is rampant and there is nothing an individual can do about it. . . . Right now, after working since I was 12 years old, I'm facing hunger and hopelessness at 57 years of age.

A man from West Des Moines wrote:

I'm a home designer/architect and have been laid off three times since 2007, after working almost 16 years at one firm. I have now decided to go back to school to try to find a different career in information technology. I hate not having a job, and want to work but there's just not anything out there in architecture. Everyone seems to have circled the wagons and are not hiring. Please help.

A woman from Madrid, IA, writes:

I lost my job (of 32 years) 2½ years ago. I lived off my severance for the first year. Then savings and then went on unemployment. Now my unemployment has run out. I have had a few interview[s] without any luck. I have been working part time for minimum wage and I only get 15 hours a week in. It's the only job that I could find.

This is just a sampling of the letters we get in our office. But it is clear people want to work. They desperately want to work.

Later this week, the committee I chair, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, will hold a hearing to look at the reasons so many millions of workers who want to work are unable to get back to new jobs quickly. We will hear from experts, workers, and community leaders about the barriers facing the long-term unemployed, especially those over the age of 50.

But there are some things we don't need an expert to tell us. We know people can't find new jobs because there are so few jobs out there. As I said, right now, more than 13 million people are officially counted as actively looking for work. But that is an understatement. There are millions more people with part-time jobs, of necessity, who want full-time work, millions more on top of that who have basically stopped looking for work because they think a job search will be fruitless. They have already tried time and time again and they have given up. But if they had a job, if they got a job, they would take it.

When we add up all that, with a number of young people who have not entered the workforce—maybe they have looked for work, they can't find it, they are young, and especially if they are young and African American, the unemployment rate soars to 30 to 40 percent. They can't find a job. If we add that all up, we are talking about nearly 28 million unemployed and marginally employed people in America.

There are many other barriers to re-employment. I have talked about older

workers. Not only have many of them gone through their retirement savings, many have lost their home that they spent decades paying a mortgage on, they have been unable to send their kids to college, and on top of that, they face the indignity of being passed over in favor of younger workers simply because of their age.

Again, it is not to say that younger workers have an easy time. I have also many stories of young people, many with college degrees, who can't find work. They are piecing together a meager existence on part-time service jobs that waste the time, effort, and money they have poured into an expensive education. I can't tell you how many young people I have talked to who have a college degree, they are not working in their chosen profession, but they are working at mostly part-time work or at service-oriented jobs that they know will not last them a lifetime, and service-oriented jobs that pay them a pittance compared to what they should be earning with their college degree. Still other workers hear they cannot be considered by employers because they have been unemployed for too long. This is so, even when a recruiter tells them they are perfectly well qualified for the job.

More workers want to move in order to take advantage of a new opportunity they have heard about elsewhere but, guess what, their house is underwater. Not physically. That means they owe more on their mortgage than the house is worth and they cannot sell it. Or they have been out of work so long they have no money left to even afford to move. They cannot even afford to pack up the U-Haul and move someplace.

Still other workers have trouble with transportation or childcare or other day-to-day issues that make it much harder to get an employer to take a chance on them. Someone came up and said to me one time: You know, for people who do not get a job, there are places in this country where there are jobs. They can move. It is a free country.

I said: What about a single mother who has two kids and she relies upon her mother as a babysitter, as a childcare person to take care of the kids when she is out working on a minimum wage job, maybe part time? How is she going to pack up and move those kids when she has, frankly, free help from her mother? These are real barriers that real people face every day of their lives.

These problems illustrate why the long-term unemployed who are working hard and playing by the rules still cannot get a job because of the factors beyond their control. Rather than chastising the victims, we should be giving a hand up to people in their hour of greatest need and help them to get back into the workforce.

This support is critical, not only for the workers and families affected but for our economy overall. Research

shows that for every dollar of unemployed benefits that is spent, we generate \$2 in economic activity. Why is that? Because this money is not saved, it is not put into a shoe box, it is spent on essentials, helping businesses up and down Main Street in communities across the country. In addition, if unemployment benefits are extended, we will save about 560,000 jobs, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

By contrast, if we fail to renew these benefits, our economy will be deprived of many billions of dollars of economic activity next year. In the end, this will have a negative impact on overall gross domestic product. On the one hand, with benefits we boost our economy with a potent return on investment, we help people in their hour of need, and we meet our moral obligations as a society. But without benefits, we hurt our economy by shrinking consumer demand, by destroying jobs, and we do not meet our moral obligation as a caring government and a caring people.

There is a strong economic case for renewing unemployment insurance, but I also say there is a strong human case for extending the benefits. Where is our basic human compassion? The thought of letting these benefits expire is unconscionable, especially during this Christmas season. After looking for work for at least 6 months but often more, many of these people already have lost their jobs, their homes, their savings, and they are now at risk of losing their last lifeline, the roughly \$300 a week they receive in unemployment benefits.

The bills do not stop coming when someone loses his or her job. The rent or mortgage, the electricity, car payments—all have to be made. The family still has to buy food, gasoline, medicine, school supplies, clothes. Unemployment benefits are a lifeline for the millions of folks who are living without an income and trying to survive. These benefits kept more than 3 million people from falling into poverty last year.

We have a moral obligation, those of us privileged to serve in the Senate and the House, to continue the Federal unemployment insurance programs while the economy continues to slowly recover. We cannot allow these benefits to expire. We cannot allow millions of our friends, neighbors, and relatives to sink into absolute poverty and desperation. We cannot fail to take action because that failure will result in families being put out on the street, children going to bed hungry, families left to shiver in the cold of their unheated homes.

I urge my colleagues to vote on this matter as soon as possible. During this holiday season, it is cruel to put millions of unemployed Americans in the position of wondering how they are going to survive come January 1 of next year. Let us renew these benefits for another year. Let us spend the next year doing everything we can to rebuild our economy, create jobs, and

provide employment to everyone who wants to work in this great Nation.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ECONOMIC GOOD NEWS

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, today I rise to note some good news about the state of our American economy. Hard work clearly remains. We are still recovering from the deepest slump since the Great Depression. But I think it is time to appreciate our recent progress.

Over the past few days and weeks, there has been plenty of positive economic news. Listen to some of these headlines. From the New York Times: "Jobless Rate Dips to Lowest Level in More Than 2 years." From CNN: "Dow closes with largest gain since March 2009." From Reuters: "Private-sector jobs soar, payroll forecasts rise." From the Wall Street Journal: "Online Sales Reach Record \$1.25 Billion on Cyber Monday."

I know it is far too early to start to celebrate, but I want to tell you a little bit about some of the details of this news. I know back in my State of Alaska, just like everywhere else in this country, people are still struggling to balance their checkbooks; that they face tough decisions about the cost of groceries, basic health care, college tuition for their kids, and just the basic expenses to live. Yet the recent news about our economy is very encouraging.

I want to give those specific examples. On unemployment and jobs, the Bureau of Labor Statistics says total payrolls increased by 120,000 jobs in November as the unemployment rate dropped to 8.6 percent—as the headline said, the lowest level in more than 2 years. Also, the latest news also marked 21 consecutive months of private sector job growth.

I know some will come down and claim, well, that is not good enough. Well, I remember when I first came here, prior to me serving in the Senate, we were averaging about 500,000 jobs being lost every month.

Let me repeat this one statistic: There have been 21 consecutive months of private sector job growth—not led by government job growth but private sector job growth. So it is not robust, but it is growing. Again, that is positive news.

Manufacturing activity climbed in November, according to the Institute for Supply Management. Its indicators tell us manufacturing is continuing to expand—another strong signal of overall economic growth.

The American automotive industry is coming back strong. Think about it again. In 2009, it was literally flat on its back trying to recover. In November of this year, light vehicle sales were up 11.4 percent compared to a year ago. That is the highest sales rate since the 2009 Cash for Clunkers Program, which many here supported.

There is more good news about the automobile industry. Ford says its November sales rose 13 percent. Chrysler Group reported a breathtaking November sales jump of 44.5 percent from a year ago. General Motors reported it sold 7 percent more new cars and trucks in November than it did a year earlier.

On investments and the markets, again, we have an important signal. It is not something you should always judge the economy on, but it is an important piece of it, and so much of middle class-America is tied to the market—maybe your 529 account or your 401(k) retirement program or the personal management of your account or, if you are self-employed, your SEP account. We are all tied to it to some degree.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed over 12,000 last Friday and gained 7 percent—just in 1 week. Let me take a moment to describe where we have come from in the market. Last week's closing numbers represent a gain of about 33 percent since early January of 2009—when several other Members and I were sworn in to the Senate. In January of 2009, the market still kept going down. In March of 2009, it dropped to its lowest level, a little over 6,600. Last week's numbers represent a whopping 81 percent increase since 2009. If you take the next step and look at the S&P index, it reflects a very similar gain—up 36 percent since 2009 and, since the dark days of March when it really crashed out, an 82-percent increase. It is important because so much of our retirement is tied to it.

If you read or hear the pundits and politicians here, it is always doom and gloom. I wanted to come to the floor and talk about some of these issues because we are moving in the right direction. We are moving in a positive way, but we don't hear this in the news because good news is not necessarily reported. It may show up one day and then disappear. When a bad thing happens, we hear about that for a week and a half and we are here talking about why it is so bad. But the overall numbers tell us the fundamentals are changing in a positive way.

The other piece, which is consumer confidence, is important because if people and businesses are not confident about the future, they will not invest, spend, or participate in the economy. But it is better.

Last month, the Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index rose to 56.0 percent, its highest level since July. Americans spent \$52.4 billion over the four-day Thanksgiving Day weekend, according to the National Retail Fed-

eration. That is the highest total ever recorded during the traditional start of the holiday shopping season. When I was back home for Thanksgiving, I heard this good news from many shop owners. The new Apple store in Anchorage saw record sales, with thousands of shoppers coming through the door, and it was a cold weekend. Sales on Cyber Monday—the first online shopping day after Thanksgiving weekend—rose 22 percent from a year ago. Americans spent another record—\$1.25 billion—on that Monday, setting again record sales for Cyber Monday.

On trade, the U.S. trade deficit narrowed from \$44.9 billion in August to \$43.1 billion in September. That is the smallest trade gap since last December and the biggest 1-month improvement since July, according to the Commerce Department.

Housing is a critical piece of our overall economy, and some say we are in the recession because the housing market collapsed, but there are also many other pieces to the equation. We never hear good news, we hear negative news. There is a lot of work to get new home starts and current inventory off the market, help people who are underwater, and make sure they can stay in their homes and receive the benefit.

The Pending Home Sales Index, a forward-looking indicator based on contract signings—people who are looking at a home to purchase and maybe have entered into a contract and said: I will be purchasing this home in 30, 60, or 90 days from now—was up 10.4 percent in October from the month before. The National Association of Realtors says home sales are up more than 9 percent from the same time last year. Again, is it as robust as we want? No. Is it better than where it was? Absolutely.

Many of the policies that my colleagues and I have fought for on the floor—a lot of times, we make decisions and we move on. We go to the next issue, and we don't have time to reflect on the results of the work we are doing. In the last 2½ years, since the great recession came into play, there have been a lot of good things happening.

As for residential construction—this is, again, people building homes, providing construction jobs, providing a new tax base for communities around the country that need it so they can hire police, firefighters, and teachers—the Census Bureau says it was at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of \$239 billion in October, up roughly 3.5 percent from the previous month.

For Alaska—again, while spending time back home, I tried to spend time with the small business community, asking them: What is happening? What do you sense? And what is your confidence level? I had a meeting with a group of small business owners, and one got a loan from the SBA recently. He took advantage of the low cost we were able to implement through legislation we pass here. It helped him get into a new restaurant. Now he employs